

Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Mohammad Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan

October 23, 2013

President Obama. It's a great pleasure to welcome Prime Minister Sharif to the Oval Office. He was reminding me that the last time he visited here was quite some time ago, and we're glad to have him back after a historic election that took place in Pakistan.

To see a peaceful transition from one democratically elected Government to another was an enormous milestone for Pakistan and a testimony to the Pakistani people's desire for democracy. And so we are very glad to be able to partner with the people of Pakistan and the Pakistani Government on a whole range of issues that are of common interest and common concern to us.

We had an excellent conversation on a wide range of issues. And at the outset, I emphasized that the United States considers Pakistan to be a very important strategic partner. We believe that if Pakistan is secure and peaceful and prosperous, that's not only good for Pakistan, it's good for the region, and it's good for the world. And we want to do everything that we can to help the Prime Minister as he moves forward on a bold agenda to achieve that vision.

We spent a lot of time talking about the economy. I know that the Prime Minister is very deeply concerned about making sure that the energy sector inside of Pakistan is functioning efficiently and that industry and jobs and greater opportunity exist for all of the people of Pakistan and all regions of Pakistan. And we discussed how the United States could potentially be helpful on energy projects, on infrastructure projects.

I applauded the Prime Minister for some of the reform steps that he's already taken. Not all of them are easy, but they promise to put Pakistan's finances and economy on a more stable footing. And the Prime Minister emphasized how trade can be a powerful engine for growth as well. And we're going to be exploring ways that we can continue to deepen trade between our two countries.

We talked about security and the concerns that both of us have about senseless violence, terrorism, and extremism. And we agreed that we need to continue to find constructive ways to partner together, ways that respect Pakistan's sovereignty, that respect the concerns of both countries.

And I'm optimistic that we can continue to make important strides in moving forward because both the Pakistani people and the American people have suffered terribly from terrorism in the past. More Pakistani civilians have been killed, obviously, from some of these terrorist attacks than anybody. And so I know that the Prime Minister is very much committed to trying to reduce these incidents of terrorism inside of Pakistan's borders and the degree to which these activities may be exported to other countries.

It's a challenge, it's not easy, and we are committed to working together—and making sure that rather than this being a source of tension between our two countries, that it can be a source of strength for us—working together in a constructive and a respectful way.

We had an opportunity to discuss Afghanistan. Obviously, Pakistan is deeply interested in how Afghanistan transitions as the United States and other coalition forces end their combat role next year and Afghanistan is fully responsible for its own security. And I pledged to fully brief the Prime Minister and his government as we make progress in not only Afghan elections, but also a long-term strategy for stability in the region.

And the Prime Minister and I both agreed that it is in America and Pakistan's interests for Afghanistan to be stable and secure, its sovereignty respected. The Prime Minister has had very good meetings with President Karzai, and I know that President Karzai very much appreciated many of the gestures that Prime Minister Sharif has made. And I'm confident that, working together, we can achieve a goal that is good for Afghanistan, but also helps to protect Pakistan over the long term.

And we had an opportunity to discuss India, and the Prime Minister had the opportunity to meet with Indian Prime Minister Singh in New York. I think he is taking a very wise path in exploring how decades of tension between India and Pakistan can be reduced, because, as he points out, billions of dollars have been spent on an arms race in response to these tensions. And those resources could be much more profitably invested in education and social welfare programs on both sides of the border between India and Pakistan and would be good for the entire subcontinent and good for the world.

And so I very much appreciate all of the work that Prime Minister Sharif has already done. He has great challenges ahead of him, but he is somebody who, I think, understands where Pakistan needs to go. And we want to be fully supportive of continued success and continued democracy inside of Pakistan.

And I shared with him that I had the opportunity, back in 1980, when I was a very young man, to visit Pakistan, because I had two Pakistani roommates in college and—whose mothers taught me how to cook *dal* and *keema* and other very good Pakistani food. And it was a wonderful trip for me and created a great appreciation and a great love for the Pakistani people.

I know that Pakistani Americans here in the United States are enormous contributors to the growth and development of the United States. And so we have these strong people-to-people connections. And my hope is, is that—despite what inevitably will be some tensions between our two countries and occasional misunderstandings between our two countries—that the fundamental good will that is shared between the Pakistani people and the American people, that that will be reflected in our Governments' relationships and that we will continue to make progress in the coming years.

So, Mr. Prime Minister, welcome. Thank you for an excellent conversation and an excellent visit.

Prime Minister Sharif. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. President, for your gracious invitation and the warm welcome accorded to me and members of my delegation. Thank you for your support to democracy and good wishes for the people of Pakistan.

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, I just had a most cordial and comprehensive exchange of views with President Obama on matters of bilateral interest and issues of regional concern. I have conveyed to the President the warm and cordial greetings of the people of Pakistan for the friendly people of the United States of America.

Over the past 65 years, our two nations have traveled together as friends and allies in defense of freedom and the pursuit of international peace and security. Besides shared history, our two countries are bound by a common commitment to the cherished values of democracy.

In today's meeting with the President, I apprised him of my government's domestic and foreign policy priorities. We also discussed a common vision to build a robust bilateral cooperation. A broad-based, stable, and enduring partnership founded on the principles of mutual respect and mutual interest serve us best.

At the domestic level, my government is focused on four key areas. And I have discussed this with Mr. President—that is economy, energy, education, and combating extremism. We both agreed that progress in these core areas is indispensable for creating new opportunities and building a hopeful future for our next generation.

Energy security is another high priority for my government. I have conveyed our deep appreciation to President Obama for the United States support in this sector. Forging a strong, great economic and investment partnership with the United States is of paramount importance for us. In this regard, we have discussed a number of ideas and look forward to further discussions between our experts in the coming weeks and months.

Pakistan and the United States have a strong ongoing counterterrorism cooperation. We have agreed to further strengthen this cooperation. I also brought up the issue of drones in our meeting, emphasizing the need for an end to such strikes.

On the regional plane, I apprised President Obama of my efforts to build a peaceful and prosperous neighborhood. In particular, I highlighted our recent initiatives with regard to Afghanistan and India.

As regards Afghanistan, let there be no doubt about our commitment for a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. This resolve remains unwavering. As in the past, we will continue to engage the United States of America in building a united, peaceful, and stable Afghanistan.

I told President Obama about my sincere commitment to build a cordial and cooperative relationship with India and our efforts to peacefully resolve all our outstanding issues, including Kashmir. Terrorism constitutes a common threat. It is as much a concern to us as it is for India. We need to allay our respective concerns through serious and sincere efforts, without indulging into any blame game. I also assured the President that as a responsible nuclear state, Pakistan would continue to act with maximum restraint and work towards strengthening strategic stability in South Asia.

Mr. President, I admire your statesmanship, your wisdom, and your commitment to high values of peace and stability around the world. I thank you once again and look forward to welcoming you and Mr. Obama—and Mrs. Obama in Pakistan. And *keema* and *dal* is waiting for you. [*Laughter*]

The President. Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:16 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Muhammad H. Chandoo and Wahid Hamid, who accompanied the President on a visit to Karachi, Pakistan, in 1981.

Categories: Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Pakistan, Prime Minister Sharif.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Chandoo, Muhammad H.; Hamid, Wahid; Karzai, Hamid; Sharif, Mohammad Nawaz; Singh, Manmohan.

Subjects: Afghanistan : International Security Assistance Force; Afghanistan : President; Afghanistan : Relations with Pakistan; Afghanistan : Relations with U.S.; Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; India : Poverty, reduction efforts; India : Prime Minister; India : Relations with Pakistan; Pakistan : Counterterrorism efforts, cooperation with U.S.; Pakistan : Democracy efforts; Pakistan : Economic growth and development; Pakistan : Energy cooperation with U.S.; Pakistan : Poverty, reduction efforts; Pakistan : Prime Minister; Pakistan : Relations with Afghanistan; Pakistan : Relations with India; Pakistan : Relations with U.S.; Pakistan : Security cooperation with U.S.; Pakistan : Trade with U.S.; Terrorism : Global threat.

DCPD Number: DCPD201300717.